



NEOLITHIC POTTERIES OF DHARMAPURI DISTRICT - A STUDY

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Abstract:

Neolithic culture in general is a stage of man's history when he crossed over from food gathering to food producing stage. This level of his growth is rightly called as revolutionary stage in man's history. Invention of Potteries plays a key role in the scientific advancement of mankind. Before the invention of metals the pottery was the dominant material in the ancient period. It also the most important and informative antiquities helps to reconstruct the ancient material and economic life. In Dharmapuri district the Neolithic phase comprises of two different phases namely the pre-pottery Neolithic phase and pottery Neolithic phase. In this study an attempt was made to reveal the significance of Neolithic pottery culture in Dharmapuri district.

Key Words: Neolithic Culture, Potteries & Dharmapuri District

Introduction:

Neolithic culture in general is a stage of man's history when he crossed over from food gathering to food producing stage. This level of his growth is rightly called as revolutionary stage in man's history. Pottery in pre-historic and proto historic cultures represents the source material, which is durable and most widely used and easily available of all the remains. Invention of potteries plays a key role in the scientific advancement of mankind. Before the invention of metals the pottery was the dominant material in the ancient period. It also the most important and informative antiquities helps to reconstruct the ancient material and economic life. So far the cultural sequence as revealed from the various excavations and explorations are 1. Neolithic pottery, 2. Megalithic pottery, and 3. Historic pottery. In Dharmapuri district the Neolithic phase comprises of two different phases namely the pre-pottery Neolithic phase and pottery Neolithic phase. People of these times were dependent on the pottery vessels for cooking, storing and many other activities of their day-to-day life. Besides these activities some potteries were also used for ceremonial purpose however these kinds represent for period.

Till recent years as recorded by B.Narashimaiah the Neolithic culture in Tamil had not attracted the attention of the scholars, inspite of the occurrence of the polished stone axes from nook and corner of Tamil Nadu.¹ After many decades of lull in the research on this subject, V.D.Krishnaswami who took up the subject, however his views solely on the tool types, thus earlier it was thought that the existence of the Neolithic culture in the region was known only from polished stone axes.² The Paiyampalli was first reported with a Neolithic habitation site and the excavation gave fresh impetus to further studies.³

Significance of Dharmapuri District:

Discoveries of Piyampalli give a glimpse of life of people and they are inadequate to solve the problems pertaining to Neolithic culture, it led many scholars to express that the Shevroy hill range in Salem district could be potential area. The extension of the problem, led further questions if not Shevroy, from where did the Neolithic folk come? Which was the route followed by them? Further, is there any regional variation in the material equipment and the way of life of the people? And what is the distributional pattern of this culture?

Intensive explorations throughout Tamil Nadu resulted with the finding of the concentrated remains of Neolithic culture in the taluks of Krishnagiri and Harur⁴ of then composite Dharmapuri district, now Krishnagiri taluk is a part bifurcated Krishnagiri district. The Neolithic habitation sites Gollappalli, and Togarappalli and the factory sites at Kappalvadi and Bargur forms parts of Krishnagiri district. Pannimaduvu, Dailamali, and Mullikkadu all in Harur taluk of Dharmapuri district are Neolithic habitation sites. Later explorations exposed the Modur in Palacode taluk, Vattalmalai in Harur taluk of Dharmapuri district.⁵ Vathalmalai besides habitation site exposed to factory site, whereas Modur is a habitation site.

Neolithic sites are located at the foothill or on terraces nearby. The hills where these are seen are bouldary in nature and sometimes replete with natural caverns useful as shelters. Another important factor is the juxtaposition of the sites and water sources. In most instances a stream or rivulet is often found within short distance.⁶

Limited Excavations:

Besides vast spread of Neolithic culture, Dharmapuri district had witnessed only two excavations namely at Adiyamankottai in and Modur in 2004-2005. The earlier one was carried by Prof. K.V.Raman, Department of History, University of Madras and other by State department of Archaeology, Tamil Nadu.

Adiyamankottai did not provide any prehistoric antiquities. Its cultural sequence records only from the megalithic culture represent with block and red wares and historic period.⁷ Sample level, and trial pits were put by Narashimaiah at Mullikadu, Pannimaduvu and Thailamalai. Proper excavation was carried only at Modur. However all these sits reveals the profusion of Neolithic culture.

Potteries of Neolithic Culture:

Narashimaiah's findings gave some characteristic details. His study revealed five major types of Neolithic potteries with their sub-divisions. They consist of Red, Tan, Grey, Brown and Black wares. In the red and grey wares five sub-divisions viz., coarse burnished, dressed and burnished, slipped and burnished and rusticated varieties were noticed. In the tan ware all the above with the exception of rusticated variety were available. The brown ware does not have either the dressed and burnished or the rusticated variety. Burnished and rusticated categories were absent in black ware.⁸ The dominant wares of Modur is grey, burnished red, brown, tan and coarse red.⁹

Chronology:

Based on the occurrence of microliths in the Neolithic phase, Neolithic celts, Neolithic pottery, the Neolithic phase is divided in five phases. They are: 1. Pre- Neolithic stone industries 3500 BCE; 2. Pre-Pottery Neolithic culture 3000-2800 BCE; 3. Neolithic phase which is grouped in three phases, the phase I: 2800- 2800 BCE, phase II: 2200-1800 BCE, Phase III: 1800-500 BCE.¹⁰ The last three phases of Neolithic is represented with pottery.

Sherd Analysis:

Sherd analysis shows a distinct variation between Thogarappalli, now part Krishnagiri district and Dailamalai and Mullikkadu of present Dharmapuri district. The analysis of the different wares indicate that at Thogarappalli red ware is nearly half at 45% closely followed by the tan ware at 30% and black ware is least. In contra to above at Dailamalai, red ware predominated at 90.51% and the tan ware was least at 1.63%, whereas at Mullikkadu all the wares were available in almost equal quantities. Further, here the gray ware was the major ceramic industry. Modur is also represented majority with gray ware, brown, tan and burnished wares were limited in numbers.

Habitation deposit at Dailamalai and Thogarappalli revealed only one layer of average thickness of 15 to 30 cm while at Mullikkadu thickness of the strata was about half metre, divisible in 5 layers; the thickness of each layer variety from 10 to 15 cm. grey wares of Modur were found in thick varieties; whereas the brown was invariable thin in size.

Technique:

Majority of vessels was handmade, while some specimens turned on a slow wheel or a turntable is also present. Mullikkadu and allied sites exhibits the later kind frequently. It seems big sized jars were manufactured by beater and anvil method. These jars are thick in section. Luting is often restored for lug handles, spouted vessels, channel spouts, and large urns. For removing or scraping of excessive clay or to make the section of the vessels thin a bunch of grass seems had been used. This method also brought about uniformity in thickness.

The coarse variety has a rough surface devoid of any slip or burnish. Burnishing for smoothing is attempted either on one surface or on both, internal as well as external. Before burnishing a thin wash is applied and then burnishing restored to. Likewise in the slipped and burnished variety, before burnishing is carried out a slip is applied. Rustication implies making the surface rough for which purpose a handful of grass or gravel is used to make the required area rough when the pot is quiet wet. They used clay for the production of grey ware in Modur was generally finely grinded.¹¹ They are well baked and having dark grey and pale grey colour due to the result of firing technique. The brown wares of this site were coarse, slipped and burnished; whereas the tan kinds were highly polished in outer surface; the burnished wares burnished either internally or externally or on both sides and were coarse in fabric.

Grouping:

B.Narashimaiah based on the strength of ceramic evidences from the explored sites had grouped them in to three, leaving Thogarappalli, the Dailamalai and Mullikkadu forms the Dharmapuri district groups. The Dailamalai group includes Pannimaduvu, Piyampalli was attached to Mullikkadu.¹² Modur either considered separate or grouped to any one of these.

Forms:

The unearthed pots were grouped in sixteen types with numerous variants amongst them. Wide mouthed vases with various rim types and globular body; wide mouthed vases with carinated neck, and straight shoulders; varieties of deep bowl with different rims, sides i.e., convex, straight etc., lid –cum-bowl, channel spouted, lug handle bowls and pots etc. Channel spouts are short and luted to vessels; while these are present at Dailamalai and Thogarappalli, they were absent in Mullikkadu.¹³ The grey wares of Modur, majority in numbers were vase, storage jar and pots; are medium in size, storage jar and vase were represented in brown which is limited in number.

Peculiarities:

The channel spouted vessels of Mullikkadu were in gray ware. Lug handles were present in all the group of sites; perforated pottery, normally with a single hole at the bottom was found in coarse red ware and this type was absent in the Mullikkadu group are some peculiarity in the Neolithic pottery of Dharmapuri district.¹⁴

Decorations:

Neolithic pottery of Dharmapuri was mainly plain however a small percentage of decorated variety is available. Incised decoration on pottery comprised chain, comb design, oblique lines, criss-cross, herring bones, ladder, notches etc. Mat impression, perhaps of palm leaf mat was also found on the bottom of the pots. Appliqué works consisted of bands which is pertinently absent in Mullikkadu. Paintings, usually, pre-firing in purple pigment over a light red was usual. But a single specimen of post firing painted pot in ochre colour on the rim was also noticed.¹⁵ The brown ware of Modur was mostly plain, but occasionally with simple grooves and incised strokes.¹⁶ Other kinds of Modur were mostly plain.

Conclusion:

The Neolithic phase potteries of Dharmapuri district is represented by handmade burnished wares. But, later pottery shows the sign of making either on slow wheel or turned table. They found in coarse texture and fabric. The finishing shows either slip or self and neatly burnished surface. Almost all pottery of early period is ill fired, indicating that they were burnt in open furnace. Mostly plain in nature decorative exceptional found in few cases. At present the word of Narashimaiah concretely that their cultural assemblage consisted of a coarse red ware and a Microlithic industry akin to the Late Stone age industries. Later on these, peoples came in contact with the people who used the grey ware, or the technique of manufacture of the grey ware was introduced into the region by contact elsewhere. Owing to this contact these people too starts using pottery. However, Vathalmalai, One of major site of Neolithic culture in the district demands full-flagged excavations to reveal the pottery mysteries whether people of this land developed themselves their own pottery making technology or from external sources by means of contact with people who knew the technique.

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